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NATIONAL WAR COLLEGE

JOINT DOCTRINE

IN A
COMBINED OPERATIONS WORLD
The JFACC

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INTRODUCTION

For nothing can seem foul to those that win.

-William Shakespeare, King Henry,
In King Henry IV, pt. 1, act 5, sc. 1.

The Joint Forces Air Component Commander (JFACC) concept has been used by American and Allied forces long before it began being published as joint doctrine. In fact, as early as 1942 General Douglas MacArthur successfully employed the JFACC concept in the Southwest Pacific.¹ MacArthur set the broad strategic guidelines within which Gen. George C. Kenney, acting in what would now be termed the JFACC role, had free reign to employ airpower as he saw fit. As commander of air assets from the Army Air Corps, Navy, Marine and Australian air forces, Kenney exercised centralized control of his forces to focus the main airpower effort as required by the evolving situation. This concept of a single commander in charge of the “AIR WAR” was further refined throughout WWII, Korea and Vietnam. Still, it wasn’t until 1990, when Saddam Hussein’s Iraqi war machine invaded Kuwait, that the now doctrinally based JFACC concept was tested in a major theater war by the United States.²

Operation Desert Shield and Desert Storm became a modern day “test bed” for the JFACC concept. From the beginning, the war-fighting CinC gave full operational control of all air assets, including coalition air, to a single commander to prosecute a coherent air campaign. While there were some severe growing pains experienced during these brilliantly successful operations—*such as what to do with the Marine’s Air Combat Element; how to integrate Navy air, and how to incorporate coalition air forces*, overall

the JFACC concept proved sound and irrefutable. In the years since Desert Storm a huge effort has been made to accurately capture and incorporate the lessons learned in our current joint and service doctrines. The lessons of the Gulf are being further refined in the ongoing air operations to support UN sanctions against Iraq--Northern and Southern Watch--and in the recent NATO air operations during the Bosnian conflict. This effort is evident in Joint Publication 3-56.1 "Command and Control for Joint Air Operations"--today's JOINT bible for air operations. However, the well-publicized concerns over the recent NATO actions in Operation Allied Force have brought into question the validity and adequacy of this doctrine.³ Even the relatively sketchy after action reports show that the JFACC may not yet be doctrinally equipped to handle the additional problems associated with a "combined" operation.

Throughout this discussion, it is important to consider what happened and the resulting consequences, instead of who is to blame. Notwithstanding, personalities do count—and in Operation Allied Force, as in all military endeavors, the personalities involved had more influence on the final outcome than any joint doctrine or military principle. Still, the question of whether joint doctrine needs to specifically address combined operations or if the details of coalition and allied warfare should best be left to the warfighting CinCs is a fair one.

THE “POLITICAL” REALITY OF COMBINED OPERATIONS

“I’ve got two arms and one leg tied behind my back, while I’m hopping around trying to figure out the best way to conduct this mission.”⁴

-General Wesley Clark

Supreme Allied Commander Europe

The fact is that no matter how good “JOINT” doctrine may be its true test will not be in a “JOINT” environment, but rather as part of a “COMBINED” effort. History shows that any major theater war will most likely be fought along with a coalition or alliance. While the US has acted unilaterally in several small-scale contingencies in recent years (such as operations in Granada, Panama, and Haiti), we have never been involved in any major military operation by ourselves. This has never been truer than it is in today’s post-cold war world. From both a political and a military standpoint, whether because of host nation support requirements, regional alliances, or international legitimacy, it is unrealistic to think that the US will conduct major military operations unilaterally unless our core vital national interests are at stake.

This was true for Operation Desert Storm, where the US response to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait was sponsored by the United Nations (UN), which symbolized world opinion against the Iraqi action. Bolstered by the shared international goals of defending Saudi Arabia and liberating Kuwait, the US set about constructing the coalition, careful to validate its every move in accordance with resolutions levied by the UN. Although the US had the military ability to act unilaterally, the Bush administration recognized the

legitimizing effect that a broad international coalition would have, particularly one including several Arab nations. Ultimately, close to fifty countries contributed directly and/or indirectly to the coalition by providing military forces, basing and over-flight permission, supplies, and financing.⁵

Diplomatically, under the auspices of the UN, the US continued to play the major role without casting itself as the sole decision-maker, while simultaneously continuing to lead the coalition's assembly of forces necessary to defeat Iraq. Militarily, the US was joined by a number of western allies, including Great Britain and France, as well as several Islamic Gulf countries, led by politically prominent Saudi Arabia. This grouping effectively served to avoid either the appearance of an American display of force against a third world country, or a non-Arab versus Arab war.

Although the US is largely credited with the overall development and prosecution of the campaign, successful completion of such a coalition effort is situationally dependent. In this situation, the US opted for the right to dictate the course of action, rather than act alone, albeit somewhat covertly. Clearly defined, mutually shared US/international goals were complemented by extraordinary coalition leadership, which sought to avoid diplomatic pitfalls such as national, ethnic, and religious pride. However, caution must be exercised when applying the lessons of Operation Desert Storm as a template for future US/Multinational coalition situations. Under different circumstances involving different players, this achievement may not necessarily be possible. Ironically, Operation Allied Force has proven to be that "different circumstance" which led to a less than optimum result.

Though not clearly articulated by NATO or US leadership prior to the commencement of hostilities, the agreed upon objectives for Operation Allied Force were the following: (1) remove the Serbs from Kosovo, and (2) return the ethnic Albanians to their homes in Kosovo, protected by an international peacekeeping force. The question that should have been asked before the first bomb was dropped is: Can NATO--19 unruly democracies, representing three-fifths of the world's economy and a larger share of its aggregate military power--agree upon and implement a course of action that will compel Serbian leader Milosovic to submit to these stated objectives?

Despite agreement upon objectives for Kosovo, there was major disagreement on the use of air power to achieve those goals. A one-dimensional war of attrition, consisting of aerial attacks of mounting intensity on selected targets of value throughout Serbia and on Serbian forces in and around Kosovo proved to be wholly inadequate.⁶ First, the application of air power was altogether too tentative—the US-monopolized NATO effort proved us to be ‘cheap hawks’ using a low-risk, high tech approach, with limited sorties and even more limited targets.⁷ The gradual introduction of forces into the theater gave Milosovic ample time to react and adjust, and most notably complete his campaign of ethnic cleansing. Although the JFACC was well versed in the use of air power and joint doctrine, the political restraints imposed by the alliance would not allow for the optimum use of this force.

The air campaign was hampered during the first weeks of the operation by numerous NATO imposed constraints. “The rules of engagement are as strict as any I’ve seen during 27 years in the military,” said U.S. Air Force General Charles F. Wald.⁸ NATO’s initial unease with its first military action ever was also reflected in its carefully

constructed mechanism for approving targeting. Not only were the individual targets directly scrutinized by SACEUR, they also required approval from Washington and from the capitals of many of our NATO allies. This resulted in an all too frequent application of the NATO “red card” making the execution of any coherent air campaign impossible based on joint doctrine.

None of these “politically” based constraints are addressed in any Joint Doctrine - certainly not in Joint Pub 3-56.1- but they are a political and military reality for the US warfighter. The question is where should the adjustments for these realities be made, in the US joint doctrine that guides our warfighting mechanisms or at the Combatant Command level where US doctrine can be tailored to suit the geo-political and military reality? According to Gen. Clark, “The procedures that were honed and developed over 50 years, the mechanism of consultation, the trust, the interoperability that we'd exercised time and again in preparation for missions, they all came together.” However, if that is indeed true, then why have the apparent shortcomings of Operation Allied Force been the subject of such an intense after action review?⁹

The answer lies in an examination of the Allied Force C/JFACC.

THE JFACC IN OPERATION ALLIED FORCE

“Once committed to actual combat, anything less than overwhelming and rapid military success for the intervening power will be diplomatically disastrous.”

-General Wesley Clark¹⁰

At the time of this operation, NATO had no plan for out-of-area or non-Article V operations. The Alliance was founded on a defensive premise - to combat threats to its

borders and incursions to the Alliance. The premise of Article V is that an attack against one would be considered an attack against all. This is what has held the alliance together for fifty years. The Alliance had studied the lessons learned from Desert Storm and was in the process of fielding a command and control structure to handle out of area operations. In the Southern Region (south of the ALPS) the command and control structure had not converted from the SOC (Sector Operations Centers), used for defensive operations, to an ATOC (Air Tactical Operation Center), used for offensive operations. Because of this shortcoming COMAIRSOUTH directed the Commander of 5th Allied Tactical Air Force to organize a temporary Combined Air Operations Center (CAOC) to conduct the day-to-day business of managing and controlling the air portion of Operation Allied Force.¹¹

The Balkan CAOC, as the operations center soon became known, was outside of any recognized NATO structure and was set up to be an interim operation until a permanent organization could be installed. The Director was the 5th ATAF Commander, a USAF two star general. He designed the organization in the manner that was required to complete tasks as they occurred. Over time the organization grew to include any and all tasks required to support the requirements of planning, tasking and controlling air power. At the height of the operation the number of personnel assigned to the Balkan CAOC topped 1400.

The functions performed ranged from air traffic control planning, intelligence, reconnaissance, airlift and all other facets of planning that support an air campaign. The Nations provided manpower for the manning of the Balkan CAOC and brought the expertise required for all the different platforms and systems operating in the theater.

This included liaisons from all participating NATO units and from the non-NATO countries that were also participating. This was a first for the Alliance. NATO forces had a concept of operations for conduct of non-Article V operations but it had only been implemented in the Northern Region (North of the ALPS) and never tested.

This new NATO concept of a “Combined Joint Task Force” (CJTF) is a multinational, multi-service deployable task force generated and tailored primarily for military operations other than the defense of Alliance territory, such as humanitarian relief and peacekeeping. It provides a flexible and efficient means where-by the Alliance can generate rapidly deployable forces with appropriate command and control arrangements.¹²

For Allied Force, the problem was that the Balkan CAOC had slowly created a US operation outside of the NATO structure. This was fostered by continuous “US only” staff functions and a completely separate “US only” air tasking order (ATO) cycle.¹³ Many actions were taken without the knowledge of the Allies. In effect the CAOC was producing two ATOs, one US only and one for US and Allied forces. This did little to instill confidence and produce an atmosphere of cooperation within the allied forces. The Ministries of Defense (MOD) of more than one country objected to the way that operations in the Balkan CAOC were being conducted.¹⁴ Their complaints included the fact that Allied personnel sent to work in the CAOC were not trained on US joint doctrine or JFACC operations. They also found that many of the allied weapons systems were not in the US database that is used for creating an ATO. These are just small examples of the challenges of integrating a combined planning and operations staff, and certainly not one that is clarified in any US joint publication.

The question that arises is do we use US joint doctrine or the procedures of an alliance in multinational operations? We believe that a single organization should coordinate, plan and task air power, but how should we incorporate the political realities of multinational warfare?

Those political realities were made clear during the target selection process, arguably the most important part of the application of air power. Since this was a first out of area operation for the Alliance the target list was sent to the highest levels for approval. This took a great deal of time because each of the countries MODs insisted on having veto authority for individual targets, making for a laborious target approval process. This approval process is not doctrinally acceptable to a US JFACC. The general premise for conduct of the JFACC functions are that US doctrine and procedures will be used, and that was simply not the case. Since this was the first ever out of area operation for NATO, the political entities had not worked out the procedures for many of the coordination issues that are required in this type of conflict. Furthermore, they were overly involved in many areas that the military, and most specifically LtGen. Short, believed should be left to them once the objectives of the campaign were agreed upon.¹⁵

In the after-math of Allied Force, NATO is still very much displeased with the way the Kosovo campaign was handled. The reasons for this displeasure include a complete misunderstanding of the actual role the alliance played in the operation and the fact that NATO was in the middle of shifting its operational methodology and organization from a primarily defense role to an offensive role. That shift brings with it a huge number of new political considerations.

The Nations are working to ensure that the military has procedures to ensure that in the next out of area operation the Alliance is more prepared to take the lead—to avoid another “US only” show. In doing so, they are attempting to ensure that all participating forces adhere to the agreements that are in place. The US should look at its objectives in the region, and help the Alliance to understand the new role it is taking on, and what that role will require, both militarily and politically. Also the US, if they are going to continue to participate in coalition warfare, must find a way to bring assets/information to the organization without waving the “Red Flag” of US ONLY.

In the final analysis, the doctrinal roles and functions of the Allied Force C/JFACC were indeed achieved. Whether “US only” or NATO combined, the C/JFACC did plan, coordinate, allocate, and task the joint/combined air operations in support of the C/JFC. However, the administrative and managerial accomplishments of these doctrinal tasks by themselves do not make for a coherent or synergistic air campaign capable of achieving the stated objectives.

CONCLUSION

“Those who do not learn from the past are doomed to repeat it.”¹⁶
-George Santayana

Firm conclusions are hard to draw at this point—US and NATO command structures are still very much engaged in a detailed, classified lessons learned effort. However, even from this cursory study a few definitive points can be deduced:

1. The C/JFACC for Operation Allied Force did successfully orchestrate a very large and complicated air war along doctrinal basis. The normal functions for a JFACC as detailed in Joint Publication 3-56.1 *Command and Control for Joint Air Operations* were - as much as possible given the peculiarities of NATO's first offensive operation - followed during the conduct of the operation. It should be noted that this did cause a large amount of training to be conducted for the allies during combat operations – not a perfect time for training.
2. The problems and issues that have been made public concerning Operation Allied Force were predominately caused by NATO's institutional basis of a defensive military alliance focused on a common enemy, and the unconventional US only chain of command that the CJTF and C/JFACC were working with.
3. The targeting problems discussed in this paper were not in and of themselves a doctrinal problem.

US joint doctrine is a work in progress--continuously updated and refined. The JFACC concept as detailed in Joint Pub 3-56.1 is still very much valid, and in and of itself capable of guiding the conduct of either a joint or combined air operation, but only if we have the lead. If we don't have the "Big Dog" in the fight we may find ourselves constrained to procedures we can't live. As long as it's understood that doctrine is a starting point, the CinC and the JFACC will be able to tailor their strategy to political realities.

As mentioned in the introduction, for Operation Allied Force, the personalities involved had every bit as much to do with the eventual outcome than any military

doctrine, and that's how it should be. We must also remember that hindsight is always 20/20 and it is easy to know all the answers when you're not being shot at.

¹ Gen. George C. Kenney, *General Kenney Reports: A Personal History of the Pacific War* (Washington, D. C.: Office of Air Force History, 1987), 48.

² Major Rolf A. Siegel, USMC, "The Evolution of the Air Operations During Operation Desert," unpublished research paper, (University of Alabama, Maxwell AFB, 16 May 1994), 59-64.

³ LtGen. Michael Short, testimony to the Senate Armed Services Committee, 21 Oct 1999, reported by American Forces Press Service.

⁴ William Drozdiak, and Dana Priest, "NATO Struggles to Make Progress From the Air," Washington Post, 18 April, 1999, 1.

⁵ Mark O. Schissler, "Coalition Warfare: More Power or More Problems?" (Unpublished Research Paper, U.S. Naval War College, Newport RI: 1993), 29-30.

⁶ Richard N Haass, "Modest Objectives, Ambitious Means," Washington Post, 19 April, 1999.

⁷ Mortimer Zuckerman, "The Evil of Two Lessers," US News & World Report, 19 April, 1999, 92.

⁸ William Drozdiak, and Dana Priest, "NATO Struggles to Make Progress From the Air," Washington Post, 18 April, 1999, 1.

⁹ Gen. Wesley Clark, testimony to the Senate Armed Services Committee, 21 Oct 1999, reported by American Forces Press Service.

¹⁰ Mark Thompson, "How We Fight," Time, 26 April, 1999, 26.

¹¹ Numerous discussions with LTC Dave Ballard, NATO staff officer

¹² Ibid

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Short

¹⁶ George Santayana. *Life of Reason*, "Reason in Common Sense," ch. 12 (1905–6).